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County Hospitals Increase Breastfeeding Rates by Adopting Better Practices

San Bernardino. San Bernardino County hospitals have demonstrated leadership in the State by adopting baby friendly practices that have significantly increased the number of newborns that receive only breast milk. As a result of the efforts made by all of the hospitals in the County, the overall percentage of infants leaving the hospital exclusively breastfeeding, has increased from 38.4% in 2007 to 58.5% in 2009. In addition, eleven of the thirty-four hospitals throughout the State that have obtained Baby-Friendly status are located in San Bernardino County.

When hospitals improve their newborn feeding policies and practices, they dramatically increase their breastfeeding rates, according to a recently released report, *One Hospital at a Time: Overcoming Barriers to Breastfeeding*, issued by the University of California, Davis Human Lactation Center and the California WIC Association (CWA). Hospital practices, such as providing skilled support staff, allowing mothers and babies to stay together after birth, and no routine supplementation with formula, play a pivotal role in helping mothers be successful at breastfeeding.

"Policies and practices that promote breastfeeding are cost effective and clearly a necessary component of standard, high-quality care," said Maxwell Ohikhuare, M.D., Health Officer, County of San Bernardino Department of Public Health. "This report reveals progress on behalf of many County hospitals that is to be commended. Hospital administrators must understand the relationship between hospital practices and breastfeeding rates, and take action to secure breastfeeding friendly environments in all County maternity hospitals."

Hospitals that have achieved the Baby-Friendly Designation have completed all of the requirements determined by Baby-Friendly USA (www.babyfriendlyusa.org), including a

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demonstration that they have correctly integrated all “10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding” healthy newborns. Baby-Friendly hospitals in San Bernardino County include Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, Barstow Community Hospital, Community Hospital of San Bernardino, Inland Midwife Services-The Birth Center (Redlands), Kaiser Permanente Medical Center (Fontana), Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital, Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital, St. Bernardine Medical Center, St. Mary Medical Center, and San Antonio Community Hospital.

Breastfeeding is a crucial first step in protecting the health of mothers and infants. Research confirms that breastfeeding significantly reduces children’s risk for infections and chronic disease such as diabetes, asthma, and obesity. It also results in children needing fewer medications and visits to the doctor than children who are formula fed. Mothers also benefit since breastfeeding helps with weight loss and reduces their risk for type 2 diabetes, and breast and ovarian cancers.

For more information, contact the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, Women, Infants and Children Program at (800) 472-2321.

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